



Taking the Oath

Grades: 4-6

This lesson is based on the Women of the Oklahoma Legislature Oral History Project. It is provided courtesy of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP) at the Oklahoma State University Library with generous support from the Women's Archives at OSU and the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women.

Formally established in 2007, the OOHRP has collected and preserved firsthand accounts from individuals who have witnessed historic moments. The Program explores the lives and contributions of Oklahomans from all walks of life.

The Women of the Oklahoma Legislature is one of many projects undertaken by the OOHRP. This oral history project captures and records information about female Oklahoma legislators in their own voices and provides an opportunity to reflect on their individual paths to the Capitol. It also documents more completely the presence of these women in state government.

The OOHRP invites you to explore the website (www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/) and meet the women who have played an important role in Oklahoma politics.



Oklahoma PASS Objectives

- **Language Arts, Grammar 3** Demonstrate appropriate practices in writing by applying Standard English conventions to the revising and editing stages of writing. (Grades 4, 5, and 6)
- **Language Arts, Oral Language/Listening and Speaking 1:3** Listen and respond to teacher-read stories. (Grade 4)
- **Language Arts, Oral Language/Listening and Speaking 2** Express ideas and opinions in group or individual situations. (Grades 4, 5, and 6)
- **Language Arts, Oral Language/Listening and Speaking 3** Use effective communication strategies in pairs or small group context. (Grades 4 and 5)
- **Language Arts, Reading/Literature 3** Interact with words and concepts in a text to construct an appropriate meaning. (Grade 4)
- **Language Arts, Writing 1:1** Use a variety of prewriting activities such as brainstorming, clustering, illustrating, webbing, and graphic organizers. (Grade 4)
- **Language Arts, Writing 1:1** Use the writing process to develop, extend, and refine composition skills. (Grade 5)
- **Language Arts, Writing 1:1** Use a writing process to develop composition skills. Students are expected to use prewriting strategies, write and revise multiple drafts, edit, and share their compositions. (Grade 6)
- **Language Arts, Writing 1:5** Share writing with peers and adults. (Grade 4)
- **Language Arts, Writing 1:6** Publish and share writing with peers and adults. (Grade 5)
- **Social Studies, Oklahoma 5:4** Identify state and local governing bodies (e.g., the state legislature and city councils) and officials (e.g., governor and mayors) that make laws and carry out laws, with an emphasis on civic participation. (Grade 4)

Lesson Objective

The students will understand what it means to take an oath to serve in public office. They participate in class discussion and understand the character traits necessary and the responsibility involved with the job.

Lesson

Each and every person serving in the Legislature has taken an oath of office. The oath is a promise that legislators make to the people of the state. It takes a lot of dedication to serve in the Legislature. For one thing representatives and senators must dedicate themselves to campaigning. This involves raising a lot of money and then figuring out the best way to get one's name known by the public. People spend tremendous amounts of time, effort, and money when running for public office. If candidates win, they will take on an enormous responsibility—representing their constituents, the people in their districts. They will serve as a voice for their district. This means they must put the will of the people before their own will.

Swearing-in day, when legislators take their oath of office, is a very important day to representatives and senators. It marks the official start of their term and is an opportunity for them to share what they have accomplished with their family, friends, and supporters. It is also the day they officially dedicate themselves to public service and agree to uphold the Constitution of Oklahoma as well as the Constitution of the United States. In a series of oral history interviews conducted with women who have served in the Oklahoma Legislature, several commented about their experiences on swearing-in day.

Bernice Shedrick was elected to the Oklahoma Senate in 1980 and served four terms, finishing in 1996. On swearing-in day, she remembers having daunting thoughts of how she, the lone woman in the Senate, could possibly gain the support of all these men and get any legislation passed. (Read Shedrick excerpt found in resource addendum.) Shedrick served sixteen years. She played a critical role in passing many bills and served as chair of several committees. She obviously overcame any obstacles she foresaw on that first day, because she was very influential.

Anastasia Pittman has been serving in the Oklahoma House of Representatives since 2006. She lists the numerous supporters she had to thank at her private swearing-in ceremony and the important roles they played in her getting elected. (Read Pittman excerpt) Who would you want to be in the audience on your swearing-in day? Who would you thank?

Odilia Dank was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1994 and served until she was term limited in 2006. She talks about realizing the scope of the responsibility she was taking on at swearing-in day. (Read Dank excerpt)

What kinds of duties do you take on in your classroom or in your school? Besides coming to school every day, abiding by the rules, and agreeing to be nice to your classmates, respect your teacher and learn a lot, what other tasks do you help out with? (Write these on the board.)

Character is who we are. When we do what is right, we are displaying good character. Abraham Lincoln said, "Reputation is the shadow. Character is the tree." Character is a combination of traits that determine how we will respond to certain situations. We should all work on building good character. It has been said that good character is the key to success. Even if someone is rich and powerful, if they do not have good character, they are not truly successful.

As a class, let's come up with some traits that contribute to good character. These traits are important for legislators to have. They are important for leaders in the classroom to have, and they are important for everyone to have. Sometimes it is hard to be some of these things, but if we work at it, we can be. (Examples of good character traits, taken from the Character First lesson <http://www.characterfirst.com/> : honesty, compassion, attentiveness, humility, enthusiasm, self-control, truthfulness, tolerance, wisdom, loyalty, responsibility, punctuality, forgiveness, flexibility, enthusiasm.)

Let's get into groups of three or four students and brainstorm, come up with ideas, on character traits that are necessary for some of the tasks we engage in. In our small groups we will write our own oath, or promise, to do the best at whichever classroom task we choose, whether it be peer mediator, hall monitor, plant waterer, or a member of the classroom. Each legislator must take a loyalty oath, and the teacher will display this on the overhead or computer and read it to the class. You can use this for an example, but make your promise a bit more descriptive of your specific task. Your job is to come up with a primary paragraph. If your classroom has a constitution, you can site

this, promising to uphold the values listed in it. If your class does not have an official constitution, come up with important traits you think should be upheld in order for every student to get the most out of the learning environment.

After everyone has come up with their promise, students can share these with the class. The class can choose to vote on the best promise or choose several according to specific tasks.

Evaluation

Students can earn points as a group when they compose their own oath. Group participation and oral delivery can also earn points.

Materials

Teacher Resources

- Blackboard/marker board
- Copy of Oklahoma loyalty oath for state officers (see resource addendum)
- Full transcripts are available at the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program's Women of the Oklahoma Legislature Project Web site <http://www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/>.
- The Character First website contains further listings of character traits <http://www.characterfirst.com/>

Student Resources

- Paper and pens or pencils for brainstorming
- Plain white paper for creating the classroom oath/promises

Enrichment

- Discuss other important public offices that might require an oath. (president, vice president, secretary of state, judges, policemen/women, mayor) Would you ever want to have a job that serves the people? Why?
- Read the Constitution of Oklahoma and discuss. Why is it important to have a constitution?
- Research another type of oath (the Hippocratic Oath, the Boy Scout Oath, the Girl Scout Promise), and write a two-page paper.
- Learn more about term limits. What do they mean? When and how did they come into effect in Oklahoma? What type of impact, if any, have they had in Oklahoma?
- Discuss why loyalty oaths have been controversial at certain points throughout history.

Resource Addendum

Transcript Excerpt:

BERNICE SHEDRICK

<http://www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/shedrick/index.htm>

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Tanya Finchum: On the swearing-in day, do you remember who all was there?

Bernice Shedrick: I do. My first swearing-in day, absolutely. My family was in the balcony. I remember standing there looking at the board that had my name on it, and the first thing that really stood out at me was—there are 48 members so I’ve got to have 24 votes and mine to pass legislation. And I started looking around thinking, “How am I going to do that? I’m the only woman here. How can I be that influential?” And I, for a few minutes, had a few self doubts about, “Oh, I hope I’ve not done my constituents a disservice, because I intend to be here and make some decisions that are going to help them.” But I did learn quickly to read every bill, and I didn’t get up to speak unless I really knew what I was talking about. I very carefully chose the bills that were extremely important to my district so that when I did make a debate, it was forceful and it was something that the members of the Senate took seriously and they knew I was serious.

Transcript Excerpt:

ANASTASIA PITTMAN

<http://www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/pittman/index.htm>

Pages 18-19

Tanya Finchum: Once you were elected, was your grandmother there at the swearing-in day?

Anastasia Pittman: Yes. Yes. Man, just proud as ever. A dream come true for her. She had never graduated high school. She worked. She was a nurse, and she was our Sunday school teacher, and she just kind of loved on the community. Everybody loved Granny, and that's what she was called. Even when she wasn't your granny, that's what you called her, and she was there front-row, front and center. My family was there. My brother and his family were there. Everybody—my church family—even the leaders in the community that I had worked for. My NAACP president was there. The black caucus members were there. My pastors in the community that supported me were there. Senator Angela Monson was there and on the program. I just love her so much because she's genuine. She's highly respected in the area, and for her to be the first African-American female president of the National Conference of State Legislators, and the first Oklahoman. It was great to have been under her leadership and for her to watch me grow and for her to watch me develop. It was great. The only person that was absent was the Honorable Vicki Miles-LaGrange, and she sent a letter. She couldn't be present, but she made her presence known, and the letter was read, and it was great. It was a great day.

I had a private swearing-in prior to all of the other elected officials. I wanted to do a private ceremony because so many people had worked so hard to get me there. When I found out that we were going to be limited to two guests—how do you tell your significant other, “Well, it's either you or my mom”? We flew my mom down here from California. My dad was present. My brothers and sisters were present. My daughter and my son were present. My grandmother was there. So there was no way I was going to be able to choose from my sorority sisters, my Sunday school class ladies who helped make phone calls and encouraged me, my community friends and family, people that my family have touched and they watched me grow up so they were proud, too. Former educators, different people that I have worked with, a school that I used to teach at—I had all my schools there. Learner's Academy was a school I used to teach Spanish at. Kip Reach College Preparatory, I invited those kids because I was the PTA president for four years there. Marcus Garvey Leadership Academy played the African drums for me. We had a very moving ceremony at 10:00 that morning at the Capitol, in the House chambers—no one else was there, it was just my private ceremony. My best friend—very close friend, who's also a judge—Judge Tammy Bass-Lesure was my swearing-in magistrate, and her daughter was my god-daughter, and her daughter was able to hold the Bible for me. She was four, so she was just small enough to hold the Bible. It was just very moving, very intimate for me. A great day in history.

Transcript Excerpt:

ODILIA DANK

<http://www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/dank/index.htm>

Pages 11-12

Tanya Finchum: Can you describe your thoughts and feelings the day you were sworn in the first time?

Odilia Dank: I think I can because I'll never forget. That it is a once in a lifetime, unique experience, and it's just absolutely overwhelming almost. You're sitting on the floor on the part of the seat of power in Oklahoma, and the galleries are packed with all these people cheering and everything. You're swearing to abide by not only the Constitution of Oklahoma but the United States of America. And it just suddenly hits you. It hit me that it's a tremendous responsibility, and that there are a lot of people to whom you owe a very accountable two years.

That capitol building, just walking into it is just, to me, so overwhelming and awesome, that even sets a mood for when you first walk in. I had been out there once before in the gallery to watch the House, many years ago. I don't know if I took some students or what. But the first time I was to go out there, I remember I felt like an airplane circling. I went through the wrong roads and things and had to go back and find the right path to the House parking lot.

Being sworn in by one of the Supreme Court judges and looking around and seeing 101 members, it's one of those experiences in life like when you get married or you have children. It's one of those great "a-ha's" of life. I guess a lot of people do those things, but this is more unique. It's just a thrilling, unforgettable experience. But with it comes suddenly the feeling of a responsibility not just to my family or my husband or anything like that, or friends, but to a whole group of people. When you think you represent 35,000 people and they put you there, all of a sudden it dawns on you that this is not a free ride. People would always say after that swearing in, "Are you enjoying yourself?" Well (laughs) you know sometimes you are and sometimes you aren't, you're just trying to do the right thing.

Oath of Office:

OATH OF OFFICE
(Art. XV O.C. §1)

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support, obey, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, and that I will not, knowingly, receive, directly or indirectly, any money or other valuable thing, for the performance or nonperformance of any act or duty pertaining to my office, other than the compensation allowed by law; I further swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully discharge my duties as _____

_____ to the best of my ability.

State of _____ Affiant Sign Here _____

County of _____

Signed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me on this _____ day of _____, _____ by _____

_____ Print name of person taking the oath

_____ Signature of the Notary

(Seal if any)

Commission Expires _____

_____ Title and Rank (if other than a notary)

Commission Number _____ (9/2003)

